CONCERNED STUDENTS
OF MIDDLEBURY

Middlebury Students' Accessibility Needs and Improvements

Survey Data Commmunication

2023

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1.
Setting the Ground Work

Key Values

We wanted to share the values important to us that guided this project.

JUSTICE

EQUITY

ACCESSIBILITY

OPENESS

ACTIVE LISTENING

ACCOUNTABILITY

EXPLORING DISABILITY AND DISABILITY LIVED WISDOM THROUGH A SOCIAL JUSTICE LENS

Definitions

Disability

A body-mind experience and a social identity. The experience of disability includes both embodied difference AND the barriers that society, systems, and environments create. Disability is therefore not an individual problem to be solved, but a human experience that is made more challenging by societal devaluing of disabled people, or ableism.

Ableism

A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. Ableism is rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Ableism impacts not only disabled people, but also those who are not explicitly disabled. An action or policy that is ableist disenfranchises disabled people disproportionately by deeming their needs "extra" or "special" compared to a socially defined "normal," therefore also considering the resources required to meet those needs "extra" or excessive.

Access Barrier

A condition or obstacle that prevents someone from using or accessing knowledge and resources. Anyone can experience an access barrier, not just disabled people. Access barriers disempower / distance us from one another as they are are obstacles that keep us from being a truly inclusive and just community.

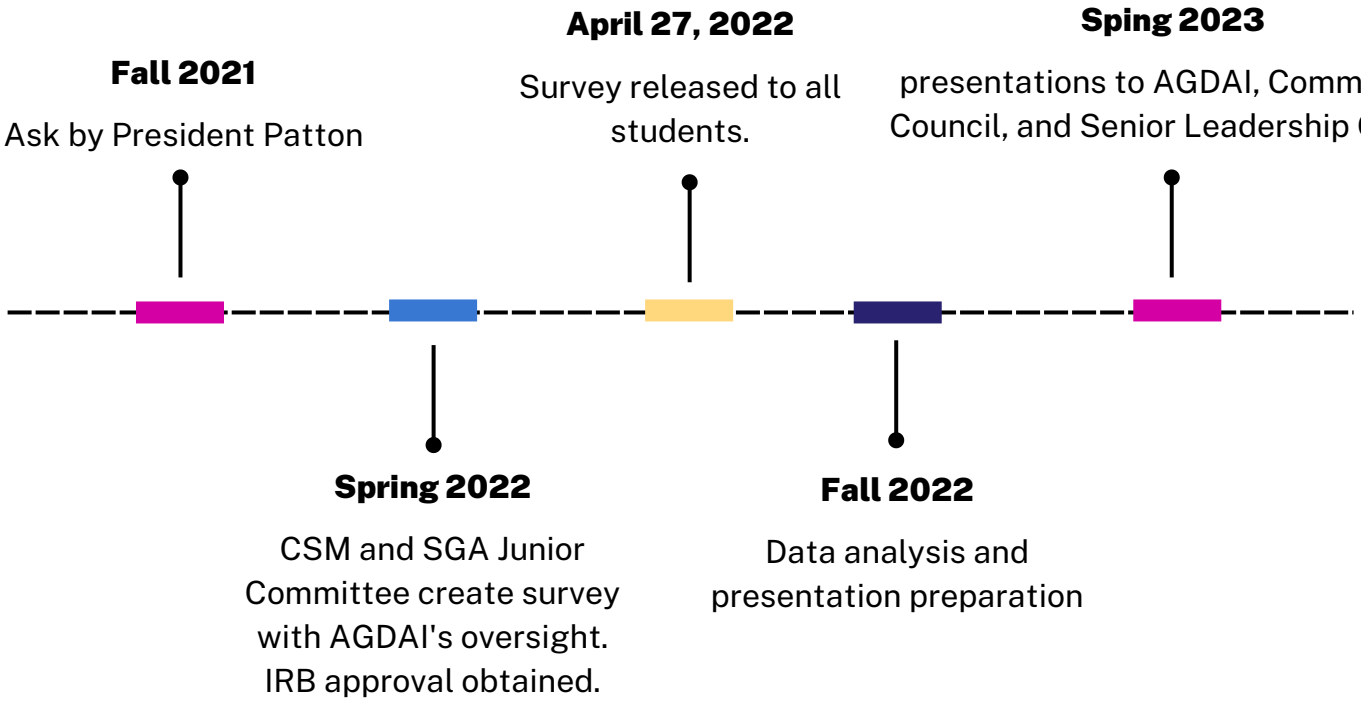
We wanted to recognize that while anyone can be impacted by ableism and face access barriers, **multiply-marginalized people are most impacted.** Their intersectional identities make it even less likely for them to thrive. Ultimately, everyone's perspectives and experiences matter and should be valued in our efforts to promote equity and inclusion on campus.

Survey Background

In the fall of 2021, President Patton asked Isabel Linhares ('22.5) for information regarding the access needs and barriers faced by students with disabilities on campus. Izzy reached out to CSM and SGA Junior Senator Aubrianna Wilson ('23) to help them create a platform for students to share barriers to accessing full participation in the Midd experience. AGDAI was also looped in to advise the process. The students who worked on this project were Isabel, Aubrianna, Anika Jessup ('23), and Citlali Aguilera-Rico ('23).

The main purpose of our survey was to give all students the opportunity to share their lived wisdom regarding barriers to accessing full participation in the Middlebury College experience and share what supports are needed moving forward. With this information, we hope to prioritize plans to create a more inclusive, equitable, and accessible community for all.

The survey consisted of 4 yes or no questions and 6 written responses.


Fall 2021
Ask by President Patton
Spring 2022
CSM and SGA Junior Committee create survey with AGDAI's oversight. IRB approval obtained.
April 27, 2022
Survey released to all students.
Fall 2022
Data analysis and presentation preparation
Sping 2023
presentations to AGDAI, Community Council, and Senior Leadership Group

2.
Survey Results

Access Barriers Discussed

1 Material Environment

Conditions in any structural environment that prevent or impede an individual with a disability from efficiently navigating the setting. This can include buildings, roads, lightings, etc.

2 Access to Information

Informational barriers occur when information is offered in a form that suits some, but not all, of the population. This can include the information format, such as printed materials written in small fonts or online content not being screen-reader accessible, or in accessing the information itself, such as pay-walls to journal articles or inclarity in how to access the information altogether.

3 Attitudinal

Attitudinal barriers result when people think and act based on stereotyping, stigma, prejudice, and discrimination.

Neither our findings nor this presentation is all encompassing of the access barriers students at Middlebury experience. Unfortunately, we do not have time to communicate all of our findings and are only going to be hitting on the common themes from the responses. The version of this report provided to senior administrators included student quotes. However, for privacy reasons, these quotes were redacted from this public version of the report.

General Statistics

152

respondents

76%	**reported material or built environment barriers**
64%	**reported informational barriers**
57%	**reported attitudinal barriers**
54%	**reported other barriers**
8–15%	**marked unsure on each of these questions**

Material Environment

Barriers Reported

- lack of ADA accessible buildings
- inaccessible terrain around campus
- communal isolation
- sensory overload
- need for more
  - gender neutral bathrooms
  - dining options that are vegan/vegetarian/allergy friendly
  - access practices in the classroom

Impact: Exclusion, isolation, lack of community connection

Students Ideas for Improvement

- urgent need for ADA accessible buildings and accessible ride service
- more gluten free, vegetarian, and allergy friendly options in the dining
- quiet hours with more dim lighting in dining halls
- Increase accessibility in the classroom (closed captioning, recording lectures, not making attendance part of your grade, zoom/hybrid modalities available)
- more gender inclusive bathrooms

Access to Information

Barriers Reported

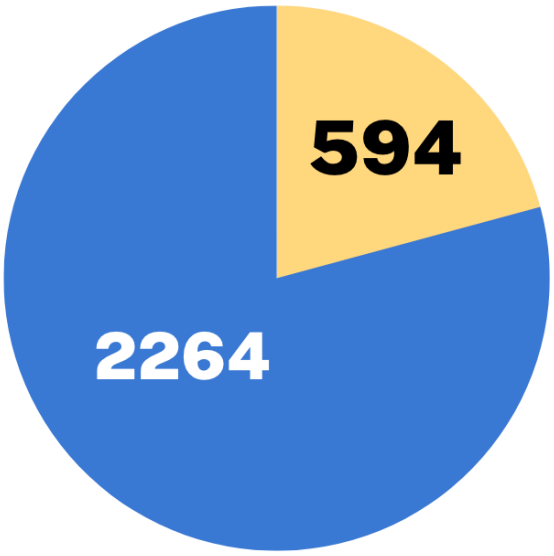
- main theme: student resources (living, learning, and being)
- barriers:
  - knowing how to find what resources exist
  - how to access the resources
  - getting your needs met when working with the resources
- resources students struggle with:
  - CTLR meeting disabled access needs
  - accessing financial support
  - DRC understaffing causing long wait times for accommodations

Impact: less students accessing resources and more students not having their needs met

Students Ideas for Improvement

- More counselors, especially those that represent marginalized students
- One easy-to-access comprehensive list of all resources on campus
- increased DRC staffing and funding
- Increase accessibility to funding resources for marginalized students
  - minimize the restrictions / barriers to accessing funding resources

Access to Information



594 students have received disability related accommodation during 2022-23 year.

That is over 1/5 students.

Increasing DRC staffing, funding, and resources was also something many students advocated for. We recognize the DRC did hire another coordinator recently, but as of this year, over one in every five students at Middlebury has received disability-related accommodation. This is 594 students. A three person team to cover this large population is not meeting student needs. Thus, students advocate for the college to provide more human and financial resources for the DRC's long term goals to not only continue collaborating with campus partners to best support student's individual accommodations needs but contribute to campus-facing inclusion/equity/access initiatives so there's less need for individual accommodations over time.

Attitudinal Community Response

Barriers Reported

- incidents of bias (racism, ableism, transphobia, etc)
- lack of awareness of disability issues and how to treat disabled people
  - pressure to take a medical leave of absence
  - disregard for chronically ill and immunocompromised students' health needs
- professors overriding accommodations

Impact: Disabled students don't feel safe nor welcomed to come to Middlebury. Students who do come and then later become disabled are pressured to leave

Students Ideas for Improvement

- Hire disabled people to help with improving accessibility
- Trainings on race, gender, and disability inclusion for staff and faculty
- Commit to intentional actions to support disabled students

3.
Conclusions

Survey Results Conclusions

Activists and scholars who study justice highlight the harm of immediately seeking to solve a problem after becoming aware of it. We must ensure that we fully understand Middlebury-specific context and structures before making solutions. We also need to identify who will take on specific projects to address the barriers mentioned today.

The overarching themes of the ideas students had to address the access barriers they faced were:

- changing our built world to be more inclusive
- make obtaining resources more accessible
- increasing funding for historically marginalized students
- invest in staff who advocate for disability access and empowerment.

We recognize that growth takes time and some of these changes are more simple than others; many of them involve uprooting oppressive systems our institution has operated within for over two centuries (pause). Some fixes will take years to implement. We will now explore together some ways we might move forward. We will also brainstorm who might be responsible for overseeing the accessibility growth we need.

Disability Justice Dreamscaping

Inspired by a Disability Justice practice of re-imagining, we are going to ask you to dreamscape. We would like you to envision what the Middlebury experience- what can and should accessibility be?

Let's imagine we have a truly accessible and inclusive community. What are the goals? What would our spaces and community look and feel like? How would we measure progress? What would not having those barriers make possible? Specifically, center on the needs of disabled and multiply-marginalized students.

Feel free to share your freedom dreams with your department and community to see how you can make your spaces more accesible and inclusive.

AGDAI & Community Council Ideas

On April 19th, 2023, Anika Jessup, Aubrianna Wilson, and Isabel Linhares presented the results of this survey to Community Council and AGDAI. The group engaged in a dreamscaping exercise and brainstormed tangible ideas to improve access and inclusion in our community. This is what the group came up with:

Dreamscaping

- when we invest into removing access barriers, abundant energy, joy, and academic pursuits are put back into our community.
  - more space learning and connecting, elevates whole community
- better the website user experience so everyone can access information
- make buildings more accessible
  - no more exclusion when accessible entrance in front (& only entrance)
    - ex : Kitchel House
- No one needs to plead for access when leader(s) bring access conversations to the forefront
- trans inclusion
- working mobility aids offered to students
- universally designed transportation system
- more ADA parking
- system changes over band-aid fixes
- no more empty promises, excuses

AGDAI & Community Council Ideas

Ideas and Projects

- Encouraging accessible classroom practices
  - Responsible Units: Dean of Academics, CTLR, DLINQ, Provost, Dean of Faculty
  - Use of inclusive practices made a part of reviews & evaluations
  - Continue trainings to prevent faculty from denying accommodations
  - site for training: Teaching & Writing Retreat
- Staff training and professional development:
  - Responsible Units: HR, Staff Council, ODEI, Leadership Alliance
  - improve existing training, increase attendance, and better advertising
  - presentations by inclusive practitioners & experts
    - ex: legality of trans student experiences, ADA rights
  - important site: HR Midd points newsletter
- Uplift supportive people
- Let students know how accommodating classes are
  - add section to Midd Courses (student run)
- increasing student reps on AGDAI
- Community Council: commitment to ask questions about access during department presentations
- Making access and inclusion a priority in the next 5 Year Action Plan for Anti-Racism and DEI
  - Departments each have living action plan
- speed up timeline by making this utmost priority to the Board of Trustees
- have department inspections, meetings with AGDAI
- currently have $105 million for "access" mainly going toward tuition
  - how can commitment to inclusion be shown using this funding?

Next Steps, Action, Accountability

How do we actualize our freedom dreams into reality? We want to emphasize that **we do not have the exact answers**. Making our community more accessible and inclusive is not a checklist and it will take dedicated effort, funding, and time. Some people may feel that all these changes feel uncomfortable, unnecessary, or are simply too complex and time consuming to even bother with. We want to challenge this way of thinking and emphasize that **all of our students matter and making each student feel supported and giving them an equitable chance of thriving should be the utmost priority.** I know everyone here is committed to improving Middlebury, so that every student has the opportunity for transformative growth, and thus, a **commitment to access and inclusion for disabled and multiply-marginalized communities will make this true for so many students.**

We invite you to lean into what might be tangible access improvements that aren't super expensive, but would make a significant impact on students' ability to thrive at Middlebury. This might look like:

- administration explicitly prioritizing inclusive design in classes as part of faculty review
- requiring workshops on the rights of students with disabilities and ableism; resourcing portions of funding for scholarships uplifting disabled, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC students
- high administration reporting on tangible accessibility actions it has completed, it is currently engaged in, and will make happen on a timeline to address the barriers students communicated in this report

Questions to ask yourself, your department, and your community

- What are we aiming to achieve for disabled students?
- What actions need to be taken?
- What are the main barriers standing in our way from making these improvements happen?
- Who are the key people who have the power to address these needs in tangible forms?

We all need to be committed to making our community as accessible and inclusive as possible. We are all accountable for creating an inclusive and accessible Midd culture. Learn more about how to dismantle ableism and support disability communities as well as uplift access and inclusion in our conversations.

Acknowledgements

Concerned Students of Middlebury would like to share of gratitude to the time and emotional labor to share the barriers they face and suggestions for improvements as well as to the people in our community who advocate for accessibility, equity, and inclusion. We would also like to acknowledge the following people and departments for their support in this process:

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  - Isabel Linhares '22.5
  - Aubrianna Wilson '23
  - Anika Jessup '23
  - Citlali Aguilera-Rico '23
- Advisory Group on Disability, Access, and Inclusion
  - notably Dr. Susan Burch
- Department of Student Affairs
  - notably Smita Ruzicka, VP of Student Affairs, and Derek Doucet, Dean of Students
- Disability Resource Center
- Student Government Association 2021-2022
- Middlebury College Institutional Review Board and Assement & Institutional Research
  - notably Martin Seehuus and Adela Langrock

Contact

For any questions, please contact

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- csm@middlebury.edu

Resources to Learn More

10 Principles of Disability Justice- Sins Invalid
Academic Ableism: Fighting for Accommodations and Access in Higher Education
Academic Ableism: Disability and Higher Education
Demystifying Disability With Emily Ladau [VIDEO]
What Is Disability Justice? Sins Invalid (excerpt from the above resource)
“How our communities can move beyond access to wholeness” by Mia Mingus
DJ Audit Tool